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Lilies Look Good for Cut-Flower Growers

By Bill Holleran

The retail floral trade in the U.S. is a \$19 billion industry. Farmers in Kentucky traditionally haven't thought about growing cut flowers, but Wal-Mart, Kroger and Meijer have been selling them in their floral departments for years, as well as wholesale and retail florist shops in nearly every town in the country. Cut flowers are the trend these days, and a look through any commercial vegetable seed catalog will illustrate how seed suppliers are marketing more flowers for cutting than ever before.

Three Toads Farm in Winchester began its flower business by starting small and learning the ins and outs of flower production. In three years they have carved out a niche at the Lexington Farmers' Market that has provided them with year-round sales. In the summer they sell at the farmers' market, and in the winter people come to the farm to purchase flowers. Lilies fetch \$8 per stem or \$22 per bunch of three, potted lilies command \$15 each, and bulbs that are held over bring \$5. The 30-foot by 60-foot greenhouse holds around 2,200 lilies, which allows them to raise



Bob Early, left, and Charlie Hendricks.

around 6,000 plants per year. They are building an additional greenhouse to expand their operation this year.

Bob Early owns the farm, and partner Charlie Hendricks and his daughter, Erin Lucas, help plant, harvest and market the flowers. The secret to their success is having a quality product that everyone wants and nobody has. They grow varieties uncommon to Kentucky that produce showy blooms and a 10-14 day vase life. Three Toads raises several types of lilies including: Oriental, Longiform Asiatic crosses or "LA Hybrids," and Oriental Trumpet lily crosses or "Oriempets." Wholesale bulbs cost from 35 cents to \$1.15 per bulb plus shipping,

and they mature from planting in 65-70 days or 100-130 days depending on variety. They are planted in potting soil in gallon pots and are hand-watered every few days as needed.

Bob Early said there is a learning curve to growing flowers and after you learn how to grow them then you need to learn how to merchandise them. "You also need the right kind of greenhouse, one that you can cool down in the summer. It's no problem to heat a greenhouse, but in the summer lilies can't take the heat and humidity found in typical greenhouses."

"We get our bulbs from Gloeckner's and have them shipped second-day air. It's

important that bulbs go from cold storage to planted as soon as possible. Shipping is expensive but necessary for quality bulbs. We also grow some lilies in the field, but since they are light-sensitive they often bloom all at once, making it harder to sell a large number at the same time," said Hendricks. "We cut the lilies when just one bloom on the stem is open to ensure the longest vase life. Timing is very important."

The group also raises pollenless sunflowers, zinnias, and lisianthus for the summer market. For more information call Bob Early at (859) 808-1340.

In This Issue

- Lilies Look Good
- Aquaculture Moving Into Appalachia
- Taste Kentucky Proud
- State Parks Buying Produce
- Division of Show and Fair Promotion
- Kentucky Recipes Being Accepted
- Happy with Hogs

Aquaculture Moving Into Appalachia

In November, Angela Caporelli, KDA's aquaculture coordinator and marketing specialist, and Dr. Jim Tidwell, director of Kentucky State University's Aquaculture Research Center, traveled to Lynch in Harlan County to meet with a group of educators, investors and economic developers to look at the potential of using defunct coal mines for fish culture. "I think I died and went to Idaho," said Angela, excited about the abundance of clean, cold water running out of the old mines. It is perfect to raise trout.

One of the attendees, Lewis Shuckman of Shuckman's Smokery in Louisville, was excited about the potential of having more local Kentucky-grown trout for his smoking and processing facility in Louisville. This is a win-win for the aquaculture industry and the economically challenged areas of eastern Kentucky that are looking for new job opportunities and income. The area known as Portal 31 includes 16 miles of old coal mine that generates more than 3,000 gallons of fresh, clean water every minute! With that kind of water flow this could

prove to be a huge resource for growing trout.

The great news is that there are several of these mines in the area that have high-quality spring water seeping out. Unlike other areas this is ground water and not runoff or snow melt, so it has the potential of creating year-round, consistent growing environments.



Aquaculture working group pictured in Portal 31 mine.

Taste 'Kentucky Proud'

Kentucky Crafted: The Market is scheduled for March 3-6 in the South Wing of the Kentucky Fair and Exposition Center in Louisville. In addition to Kentucky artwork, crafts, and textiles, the market will offer food products from 47 food companies. This will be the 24th year for Kentucky Crafted, sponsored by the Kentucky Craft Marketing Program, and the 12th year for the Kentucky Proud food section, coordinated by the Kentucky Department of Agriculture.

Wholesale (for buyers only) customers can visit over 300 exhibitors from March 3 from 1-7 p.m. or Mar. 4 from 9 a.m.-8 p.m. Retail buyers (general public) can visit March 5 from 9 a.m.-6 p.m. or March 6 from 10 a.m.-5 p.m. EST.

This is your chance to sample cheeses, salsas, jams and jellies, marinades, barbecue sauces, pickles, candies, honey, country ham, bison, and popcorn from across the Commonwealth.

-Elizabeth Smith

State Parks Buying Produce From Kentucky Farmers

Bob Perry, food service director for the Kentucky State Parks Department, discussed plans to purchase Kentucky-grown produce again in 2005 at the annual Kentucky Vegetable Growers Conference in January. In April 2004 the Parks department started buying Kentucky produce and again plans to purchase half a million dollars worth of product for 22 of its restaurants across the state this year.

"We're converting our kitchens from electric to gas to help our chefs be better equipped to prepare a wider variety of products and allow them to change their menus on a daily basis. We want our chefs to work with local producers, and we encourage farmers to develop relationships with them," said Perry.

Prices farmers receive will be based on weekly average prices of wholesale vendors. These prices would typically be lower than prices paid at farmers' mar-

kets, but higher than prices paid through cooperative marketing or selling to a wholesaler.

Parks is also working to get value-added products and beef and pork into their menus. Perry expects 2 million diners will visit parks across the state this year, and "that's 2 million marketing impressions that we have the ability to influence," said Perry. This is a perfect opportunity to build notoriety for the "Kentucky Proud" marketing campaign.

State parks that will be buying produce this year include: Cumberland Falls, Lake Cumberland, Kentucky Dam Village, Kenlake, Pennyroyal Forest, Lake Barkley, Rough River Dam, Barren River Lake, Jenny Wiley, Natural Bridge, Carter Caves, Dale Hollow Lake, Buckhorn Lake, Greenbo Lake, Blue Licks Battlefield, Pine Mountain, and General Butler. Cafés in Frankfort operated by Parks are also buying produce.

Contact Rhonda George at (502) 564-3142 for details about the cafés. Future plans include featuring Kentucky products at the artisan center in Berea and the Benham School House Inn near Kingdom Come State Park.

To be eligible, producers need to sign up at one of the parks and join the Kentucky Proud marketing campaign through the Kentucky Department of Agriculture. Details on how to become a member can be found at www.kyproud.com. Perry said farmers will be paid through the Finance Cabinet, and payment can be received through direct deposit. You're not required to live in the county where the park is located, but you are required to honor your agreement and follow through with scheduled deliveries.

-Staff Report

Division of Show and Fair Promotion Highlights

By Jeff Zinner

In January, the Division of Show and Fair Promotion had its first-ever Kentucky Junior Livestock Points Program Banquet in Bardstown. This event honored over 300 youth exhibitors, animals, and producers for excelling during the 2004 Kentucky Department of Agriculture-conducted show season. Every youth exhibitor, animal, or producer is automatically eligible for the program when an animal is shown at one of KDA's district, preview, or expo shows. The Points Program was developed to recognize and reward exhibitors and producers for their hard work and effort throughout the show season. The Awards Banquet was a huge success and will only get better in the future. There will be a few changes to improve this program next year, including awarding points for participating at the Kentucky State Fair. Be sure to check out the new rules and regulations in the Livestock Rule Books coming out at the end of February.

The Kentucky Beef Expo will be March 4-6 at the Kentucky Fair and Exposition Center in Louisville. This event

is for all beef cattle enthusiasts across the nation. This year the Beef Expo features 13 breed shows and sales, a trade show, a 4-H/FFA livestock judging contest, display alleys for bulls and donor females, and a Pen Heifer Show and Sale where registered and commercial cattle are sold in groups. New to the Kentucky Beef Expo this year is the Gelbvieh Show and Sale. On Sunday, the Expo concludes with the highly competitive Junior Heifer Show, Market Steer Show, and Market Heifer Show. The expo will include over 600 cattle from 13 different breeds. The animals being sold at this event are from the most elite and modern genetics and have all been screened for quality, conformation, and production. If you are looking at getting into the cattle business or just improve your herd, this is an event you won't want to miss!

The 43rd Annual Kentucky National Shows and Sales are rapidly approaching. This year, Ayrshire, Brown Swiss, Guernsey, Holstein, and Jersey cattle will be shown and sold April 7-8 at the Kentucky Fair and Exposition Center in Louisville. More than 300 dairy cattle from throughout the United States will come to Louisville. Dairy producers will

compete for over \$40,000 in premiums and prizes. Bryan Proctor, dairy coordinator for the Division of Show and Fair Promotion, said, "The Kentucky National Dairy Shows and Sales Program provides producers with an opportunity to purchase animals with excellent production and type records. These sales provide breeders and buyers with opportunities to purchase and sell animals from the most elite bloodlines across the nation."

In conjunction with the Kentucky National Shows and Sales will be the first Kentucky-Kow-A-Rama. This new event, scheduled for April 9-10, will be highlighted by a Junior and Open Dairy Show. The Kentucky-Kow-A-Rama will host several hundred dairy cattle from all over the nation competing for over \$17,000 in awards and prizes. During both the Kentucky National Shows and Sales and the Kentucky-Kow-A-Rama, visitors should also be sure to check out the first-ever trade show. This will be a must-see event for anyone interested in the dairy industry!

For more information on any of these events, go to www.kyagr.com or contact Jeff Zinner with the Division of Show and Fair Promotion at (502) 564-4983.

Kentucky recipes being accepted for new cookbook

Sharon Thompson, veteran food writer for The Lexington Herald-Leader, is writing a new cookbook featuring traditional Kentucky recipes as well as new recipes from Kentucky food producers.

The newspaper is looking for people from all over the state who make products such as jams, jellies, cheeses, salsa and bread mixes, as well as farmers who produce pork, lamb, beef, chicken, trout, shrimp and vegetables to submit their recipes for the new cookbook. Anyone who submits recipes will have their farm or company name listed along with their recipe.

This is a great way to share your favorite recipes with other Kentuckians, grab some attention for your products, get some free advertising for your farm or business, and help promote Kentucky's fine foods and food producers.

The Herald-Leader also is interested in finding the best cooks in your area. Someone who often wins the blue ribbon at the state or county fair, or the person known as the best cook in the county.

Anyone interested should send their recipe, along with information about their company or farm, to Sharon Thompson at 1-800-950-6397, ext. 3321, e-mail swthompson@herald-leader.com, or write to Sharon Thompson, Food Writer, Lexington Herald-Leader, 100 Midland Avenue, Lexington, KY 40508. Anyone is welcome to submit an entry as long as they meet the March 1 deadline.

The new cookbook is scheduled to be released in August and will be available on the Internet at www.kentucky.com and through bookstores in the Lexington area.

Need Help With Marketing?

Call KDA's marketing specialists when you need marketing assistance at (502) 564-4983.

Agri-Tourism - Kelly Ludwig

Aquaculture Marketing - Angela Caporelli

Beef Marketing - Tim Dietrich

Dairy Marketing - Eunice Schlappi

Farmers' Markets - Janet Eaton

Goat Marketing - Tess Caudill

Kentucky Proud Program - Anna Kindrick

Landscape and Nursery Marketing - Hope Crain

Organic Program - Jake Schmidt

Processed Foods - Elizabeth Smith

Happy with Hogs

Fred Brown Jr.'s family has been farming the hills and river bottoms of Estill County for over 100 years. Although the Browns have seen many changes in agriculture through the years, hogs have always played a key role in their family farming operation. Fred Sr. started farming when he got out of the Army in '46 and has raised hogs since the 50s. The Browns raise cattle, hay, straw, corn, and have a farrow-to-finish hog operation on the 500 acres they farm in Irvine.

When the hog market crashed in 1998, many Kentucky hog producers went out of business, gobbled up by vertical integration and large-scale factory farms and packers that controlled market prices. By direct marketing over 200 meat hogs each year the Browns were able to compensate for low prices and increase their marketing options. The family's 50-60 sows average around 110-115 litters with 7.7 pigs per litter last year which equates to around 900 pigs. Their 200-250 meat hogs are often fed out to 300-350 pounds for customers wanting to buy a hog for their freezer. The majority are still sold at 250 pounds through a co-op that delivers their hogs to the Paris Stockyard to be purchased by Tyson, which ships them to Logansport, Ind., to be processed. This system has

helped Brown's hogs average 55 cents on a live-weight basis.

The Browns raise around 90 acres of corn for their hogs, and they pick, shell and grind it themselves and use the cobs for bedding. Fred even mows his corn stalks down, rakes them into windrows, and rolls them into bales to use for bedding. By breeding 14-16 sows at



Fred Brown Jr. in his farrowing house.

the same time and farrowing one group of sows every five weeks, Brown has pigs at different stages of development, which gives him year-round cash flow. "I enjoy our cattle, but hogs pay the bills around here. Hog cycles are short, and prices fluctuate, so you have to be committed and stay with it," said Brown. Brown said many people get in the hog business when prices are high thinking they will make a lot of money and then get discouraged when the market drops. He also said that although

state-of-the art equipment is nice, it's not essential.

Brown runs gestational sows outside in paddocks with access to a barn and farrows them inside an old tobacco barn. He uses heat lamps to keep baby pigs warm in the winter and has a heated nursery available to pigs that are being weaned. Feeder pigs are run in a quonset-type building bedded with corn stalks and are on self-feeders which are replenished as needed. Brown stays in business by using his own labor rather than spending high prices for automated equipment typically found in large-scale operations, and purchasing only the supplies he needs. Buying equipment little-by-little requires patience but helps avoid overwhelming debt.

Brown is active in many organizations and serves on the local Farm Bureau Board of Directors, the Estill County Cattlemen's Association, Fair Board, the local agricultural development council, and agricultural leadership council. Brown proves that there is hope for young farmers who want to pursue careers in production agriculture when they are committed to following their dreams. If you are looking to buy meat hogs or straw call Brown at (606) 643-5107.

-Bill Holleran

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